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Creating the Conditions for Nuclear Disarmament (CCND)

Working paper submitted by the United States of America*

"Nations do not mistrust each other because they are armed; they are armed because they mistrust each other."

— President Ronald W. Reagan

Introduction

1. The international community has struggled for decades with the problem of how to achieve the total elimination of nuclear weapons. While we have made great progress, the long-term goal — a goal which the United States continues to support — remains elusive. If we continue to focus on numerical reductions and the immediate abolition of nuclear weapons, without addressing the real underlying security concerns that led to their production in the first place, and to their retention, we will advance neither the cause of disarmament nor the cause of enhanced collective international security.

2. To get the international community past the sterility of such discourse, the United States seeks a more meaningful and realistic dialogue, one that has a genuine prospect of moving us toward the nuclear weapons-free world we collectively seek. Such a dialogue would address those underlying security concerns that have made the retention of nuclear weapons necessary to forestall major power conflict and maintain strategic stability. This engagement is very important, because continuing to focus on numbers of weapons apart from their underlying rationale risks states talking past each other even as nuclear arsenals remain or, in some cases, expand. Our goal is progress, not rhetoric or simply virtue-signalling; so for us, the choice of a constructive dialogue is clear.

3. The United States previously has spoken in broad terms of the need to create the conditions conducive for further nuclear disarmament. This working paper seeks to lay out some of the discrete tasks that would need to be accomplished for such conditions to exist. It is not intended to be a "roadmap," identifying a particular order for such tasks to be accomplished, nor is it meant to be an exhaustive list of all needed actions. Nor is it meant to suggest that no further movement toward disarmament could possibly occur before every issue raised herein has been fully and conclusively addressed. Rather, it is meant to foster a thematic dialogue of the improvements that all states must work together to accomplish if nuclear disarmament is to have a future.

* The present document is being issued without formal editing.

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While this paper is intended to contribute to the NPT review process, the ideas it presents and the work it lays out do not apply solely to NPT Parties but also to the broader international system, including NPT non-Parties.

The International Security Environment

4. Most, if not all, nations aspire to live in a more peaceful, stable, and prosperous world — a world in which states feel secure within their borders, unthreatened by their neighbors. This would be a world in which the relationships between nations, especially major powers, are not driven by assumptions of zero-sum geopolitical competition, but are instead cooperative and free of conflict. This would be a world in which nuclear deterrence is no longer considered necessary as the ultimate guarantee of security.

5. But that world is not simply today's troubled world absent nuclear weapons. It will only be possible when a fundamental shift in the geopolitical landscape has brought about security conditions in which all states conclude, based on their own sovereign threat perceptions, that nuclear weapons are no longer required. That will, of course, be a very long process. In the interim, progress in improving the international security environment can enable further progress on reducing the role and numbers of nuclear weapons throughout the world. That is the lesson of history.

6. All states base their national security decisions on perceptions of present or future geopolitical threats to themselves and their core interests. This basic principle of international relations applies in particular to nuclear disarmament more than in any other area. Disarmament does not and cannot take place in a vacuum; its availability, direction, and pace depend upon the prevailing international security environment. The ending of the nuclear arms race in the closing years of the Cold War was possible as a result of the shifting environment of that era; likewise, the reductions in the years following the Cold War were also made possible by significant improvement in that security environment. Both of these time periods yielded significant progress in reducing nuclear dangers precisely because leaders heeded and responded to improvements in the prevailing security conditions.

Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Stability

7. Nuclear deterrence, including extended nuclear deterrence, continues to play a central role in ensuring the global stability and security from which all states benefit. And stability in all its forms — economic, social, strategic — contributes to confidence and security in ways that allow states to pursue disarmament. Each state's approach to deterrence and disarmament is shaped by all the factors that affect its perception of its interests and the threats to those interests. This does not mean that nuclear arsenals cannot be further reduced until all conditions are perfect. Rather, it means that states are more likely to conclude that disarming is consistent with their national security interests if they are confident that international tension is decreasing and that progress on disarmament will not be destabilizing. And, assuming there is no single miraculous leap from where we are today to some kind of nuclear "zero," it also means that we will need to address how stability is maintained at very low numbers of nuclear weapons, a situation we have not dealt with since the period immediately following the Second World War — and one for which there is as yet no precedent for successfully preventing a full-fledged arms race between rival powers.

Articulating a New Way Forward: The CCND Approach

8. All NPT Parties bear responsibility for working together to improve the geopolitical environment and create the conditions for nuclear disarmament — that is, to take the "CCND Approach," as we have begun referring to it. This new approach

to disarmament diplomacy envisions all NPT Parties contributing to efforts to ameliorate conflicts and rivalries that lead to the continued reliance on nuclear weapons and nuclear deterrence. This approach will require a new focus on the development of measures across the complete spectrum of commitments under the NPT and beyond that create the conditions for future nuclear disarmament negotiations. The Preamble of the NPT refers to the "easing of international tension and the strengthening of trust between states in order to facilitate" disarmament. This concept of easing tension between and among states, including through effective measures that build trust and confidence, is the necessary starting point for fostering the conditions for nuclear disarmament, in accordance with Article VI of the NPT. Accordingly, we offer below some international security conditions that we believe would likely need to be achieved through specific actions and effective measures in order to facilitate the pursuit of a nuclear weapons-free world.

Reducing Regional Tensions and Conflicts

9. In today's world, the most pressing goal for the international community is North Korea's complete, verifiable, and irreversible abandonment of its nuclear weapons program, including its production of fissile material, and the rolling back of its ballistic missile threats. It will also be necessary to ensure Iran's verified compliance with its nuclear non-proliferation obligations and ensure that it is never again able to position itself dangerously close to nuclear weaponization. Without a renewed, demonstrated commitment by all states — and in particular certain nuclear-weapon States (NWS) — to respect the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of their neighbors, other nations will continue to seek nuclear deterrence, either through their own nuclear arsenals or through a reliance on alliances with a NWS.

10. Importantly, states make determinations about their deterrence and defense requirements based on their perceptions of the regional security environment they face. Unfortunately, there are numerous, clear examples of regional conflict and tension that contribute to states' perceptions that they require a nuclear deterrent. Failing to address these tensions will not advance prospects for universalization of the NPT. As another vital improvement to the global security situation, all nations, without exception, should renounce terrorism as an instrument of their foreign policies, and recognize the State of Israel's right to exist. As another example, the achievement of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction Free Zone remains a priority for many states, but it can only occur through direct dialog among all the states of the region and on the basis of arrangements freely arrived at among the states of the region.

Non-Proliferation

11. The NPT is the cornerstone of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime, and non-proliferation is the cornerstone of the NPT. Neither meaningful international nuclear cooperation nor disarmament could succeed in the absence of strong non-proliferation guarantees. If we wish possessor states to conclude that they will remain secure without nuclear weapons, and thus disarmament is possible, they must have confidence that no other states will develop such weapons. Full compliance with IAEA safeguards, including adherence to the Additional Protocol as the de facto standard for verifying that NPT safeguards obligations are being met, also remains a critical component of global non-proliferation efforts and contributor to the likelihood of disarmament.

Disarmament

12. A moratorium on the production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons or other nuclear explosive devices by all countries possessing nuclear weapons is also an essential step. The international community has focused on the commencement of negotiations on a treaty banning production of fissile material for use in nuclear weapons. However, those efforts have failed due to one fact alone — some particular states feel they need more such material, or at least, are not prepared to forego that option as they build their nuclear arsenals. An essential condition of any negotiation will be the willingness of all states to end such production; once that is achieved, concluding a treaty should be possible.

13. Similarly, halting the further increase in nuclear arsenals of all states that possess such weapons would serve to create confidence that could lead to progress on the reduction of arsenals. Although the United States has reduced its nuclear arsenal by more than 88 percent since its Cold War peak, others have moved in the opposite direction. Russia, China, and North Korea are currently increasing their stockpiles and diversifying their capabilities, engaging in nuclear and ballistic missile testing, increasing the prominence of nuclear weapons in their security strategies, and — in some cases — pursuing the development of new nuclear capabilities to threaten other nations. Nuclear stockpiles and capabilities are also expanding elsewhere in Asia in ways hardly consistent with giving nuclear disarmament a viable future.

14. Finally, improving transparency about nuclear policies, plans, and doctrines would be a critical confidence-building measure for further negotiated nuclear weapons reductions. As the 2018 U.S. Nuclear Posture Review notes, "Arms control efforts must now emphasize confidence and security building measures to rebuild trust and communication. We are prepared to consider arms control opportunities that return parties to predictability and transparency and remain receptive to future arms control negotiations if conditions permit and the potential outcome improves the security of the United States and its allies and partners."

Verification

15. An essential element of efforts to create the conditions for future nuclear disarmament will be ensuring that we have the capability and capacity to verify any potential reductions. For eventual global nuclear disarmament to become a reality, all states, including nuclear weapons possessors, will be required to submit to credible, effective, and timely verification. We will need to work together to ensure that we have the technologies, capabilities, and experience to carry out the verification measures that would be necessary, as well as to ensure that the international community responds swiftly and decisively to any noncompliance.

Compliance

16. Compliance by the NWS with all of their existing and future treaty obligations — and the tools and political will to address instances of noncompliance — is a necessary foundation for nuclear disarmament, as is compliance by non-nuclear weapons states with their non-proliferation obligations. However, even a clear prohibition of nuclear weapons, coupled with a detailed plan for their elimination and robust verification provisions, may not be enough, unless the international community can reliably face the challenge of compliance enforcement. Indeed, this is not just a challenge at the point of abolition. Maintaining stability even at lower numbers of nuclear weapons will require high levels of confidence that all states are complying with their commitments and that noncompliance will be addressed effectively. Recent violations of treaty obligations and the apparent lack of will to address concerns, however, undermines that confidence.

17. Today, compliance problems shadow the prospects for disarmament — and not merely because Russia continues to violate the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. This is also a problem with regard to the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC). The CWC was designed to ban, eliminate, and verify the destruction of chemical weapons, all in one agreement — the first time the international community ever attempted to do all this with a category of weapons of mass destruction. Regrettably, however, we have seen an erosion of the international norm against chemical weapons use — largely with impunity — as well as concerted efforts by some states to undermine the efficacy and credibility of the institutions of transparency and accountability upon which the international community relies to ensure that such disarmament regimes succeed. If we are to achieve the goal of a world without nuclear weapons, the international community must rededicate itself to ensuring compliance, including through effective enforcement measures.

Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy and Nuclear Security

18. Another challenge to the stability of a world without nuclear weapons is ensuring that nuclear technology transferred, acquired, or developed for peaceful purposes is not diverted or misused to produce or develop nuclear weapons. The NPT provides a foundation for cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear energy, recognizing the potential for nuclear and non-nuclear applications to vastly improve quality of life around the world. However, in order to create conditions for nuclear disarmament negotiations, it is essential to manage and minimize the risk inherent to some degree in all nuclear technology. To this end, we have achieved broad consensus on constraining the most sensitive stages of the nuclear fuel cycle and minimizing the civilian use of weapons-usable nuclear material.

19. However, that consensus is in danger of eroding. Since the NPT entered into force, the major suppliers of nuclear technology have adopted a set of standards for legitimate commerce that reduce this risk and facilitate legitimate nuclear trade by ensuring a level foundation of non-proliferation principles. This foundation is dependent, however, on the continued viability of a diverse and stable market for nuclear goods and services. As states pursue unconstrained access to nuclear technology, the pressure to disregard vital non-proliferation principles in connection with supply of the most sensitive aspects of the fuel cycle — and failure to insist upon the highest safeguards standards, including the IAEA Additional Protocol, in all civil nuclear cooperation projects — undermines the non-proliferation regime, eroding confidence that the Article IV nuclear cooperation architecture is capable of functioning in ways consistent with non-proliferation imperatives, and thus potentially threatening that architecture as well as making the eventual achievement of nuclear disarmament less likely.

Conclusion

20. All nations can and should work to create the conditions essential for nuclear disarmament. Doing so will help to fashion a world in which nuclear weapons are no longer necessary to deter aggression and maintain global strategic stability. As we seek this lofty objective, to which the NPT has made an immeasurable contribution over the last 50 years, the United States looks forward to engaging with all States Party on these important issues.